

# Marin Independent Journal

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## MARIN VOICE

### Lawmaker offers help on FM

**F**M RADIO plays an immensely significant role in Marin. Community programming such as KPFA and KQED provide residents with valuable information, insightful interviews and enlightening commentary.

Moreover, local retailers have commercially supported FM radio in order to reach Marin consumers to market their restaurants, hardware stores, car dealerships and other neighborhood establishments.

While some receive FM stations without a problem, others due to Marin's hilly topography are unable to receive FM stations clearly on their radios. These residents who live in blackout areas in the valleys of Mount Tamalpais and other large hills and rises only receive static through their speakers. In the past, some residents had been able to get around geography by connecting their radios to Comcast Cable in order to clearly receive the wide variety of FM programming.

All was fine until Feb. 15 of this year, when Comcast eliminated FM radio from its cable programming in Marin in order to free up bandwidth on its distribution lines.

Bandwidth allows Comcast to provide more commercially lucrative products such "High Definition TV" and "Video on Demand."

Since the suspension of FM service, my office has been contacted by numerous constituents and consumer groups who have voiced their despondency and frustration over the unavailability of FM

#### CAROLE MIGDEN



*Carole Migden, D-San Francisco, represents Marin in the state Senate.*

radio via cable.

Marin Supervisor Susan Adams alerted me to the problem and asked me to intervene, if possible, and to visit the issue of restoring FM service to thousands of Marin residents.

I am happy to report that at my office's request, Comcast has agreed to sit down to meet local FM radio stations, the Marin Telecommunications Agency, Supervisor Adams and other stakeholders to examine possibilities that would return FM service to those residents who live in blackout areas.

Key questions will arise in this meeting regarding transmission, bandwidth, market forces, costs, the role of local government and viable alternatives. For example, in San Francisco, where the topography is similar to that of Marin and makes FM transmission a challenge, Sutro Tower stands 977 feet tall at the top of Twin Peaks and transmits local

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FM radio and television. This may not be a preferred solution, as a large radio tower raises real environmental and health concerns with regard to earthquake safety and radiowave radiation.

Ultimately the Marin Board of Supervisors will have to determine how far it is willing to go to restore FM radio.

This is a complicated issue influenced by Federal Communication Commission regulations, county franchise agreements, the intrinsic value of FM community programming, the local small business economy and one very large and powerful corporate giant.

The good news is that all parties have agreed to break bread, sit down and attempt to hash out a solution.

My office will continue to stay on top of the situation.